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Hemingway's Primitivism: Notes Towards an Anthropological Reading

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In 1925, Virginia Woolf wrote, "in or about December, 1910, human character changed." The event to which this famous remark referred was the exhibition, "Manet and the Post-Impressionists," that had been organized by her fellow Bloomsburyite Roger Fry, introducing the work of such artists as Gauguin, Matisse, and Picasso to the English public, and marking "the debut, thirty years after their appearance in France, of the primitive in high culture."¹

In France, the modernist movement in painting is generally acknowledged to have begun in 1907 with the unveiling of Picasso's "Les demoiselles d'Avignon." A year prior to this, Picasso, as well as Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck, Braque, Leger, and Modigliani, had started collecting tribal objects from Africa and France's other colonial possessions and incorporating their influences into their work.² The most "shocking" aspect of "Les demoiselles" was considered to be the fact that three of the prostitutes pictured had faces drawn from African masks. On a more popular level, the sensation created by the arrival of the African-American dancer Josephine Baker on the Paris stage in 1925 merely confirmed the long-standing enthusiasm that the French possessed for dark-skinned peoples, an enthusiasm whose *locus classicus* is, of course, Rousseau's valorization of "the noble savage" in his "A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality."³

In the United States, the 1920s saw the appearance of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1924), DuBose Heyward's *Porgy* (1925), Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* (1925), Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter* (1925), and the nationally-success-

ful, all-black musical "Shuffle Along" (1921-24). Thus, 1921, the year Ernest Hemingway and his wife Hadley arrived in Paris, marked the beginning of the culmination of a period of unprecedented interest in "the primitive" that was even to lend its name to the decade as the Jazz Age.

Because of the frivolous nature of many of the cultural productions resulting from this enthusiasm, perhaps the best way to grasp the real significance of the vogue for primitivism on trans-Atlantic culture at that time is to measure the force of the backlash against it. In 1916 Madison Grant, the president of the New York Zoological Society and a trustee of the American Museum of Natural History, published *The Passing of the Great Race*, which classified Europeans into three "races": "Mediterraneans," "Alpines," and "Nordics" ("Nordics" became a popular term, used by white people to designate themselves on their trips to Harlem). On the premise that most animals have dark eyes, Grant used a pseudoapplication of the Medelian concept of "reversion" to declare that certain traits, such as dark features, broad noses, and dark hair were closer to mankind's animal past. Because these traits were more basic than those characteristic of the more "highly-evolved" Nordic type, they naturally dominated in crosses between "lower" and "higher" races. According to Grant, the result of a "cross between a white man and an Indian is an Indian; the cross between a white man and a Negro is a Negro; the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew," thus the white race was in danger of being lost through reversion.⁴

Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color*, published in 1920 with an introduction by Grant, found even more popular acclaim. Stoddard's book, along with Emile Fournier-Fabre's *Le choc suprême, ou la mêlée des races* (1921), Maurice Muret's *Le Crépuscule des nations blanches* (1925), (translated into English as *The Twilight of the White Races*) all shared a sense of impending doom for the white

race(s).⁵ The degree to which these ideas had entered the common vocabulary is illustrated by the following passage from *The Great Gatsby*, where Tom Buchanan is depressed by a book that seems to be a cross between Grant's and Stoddard's:

"Civilization's going to pieces," broke out Tom violently. "I've gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read *The Rise of the Colored Empires* by this man Goddard?"

"Why, no," I answered, rather surprised by his tone. "Well, it's a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved... This idea is that we're Nordics. I am, and you are, and —" After an infinitesimal hesitation he included Daisy with a slight nod, and she winked at me again. "—And we've produced all the things that go to make civilization — oh, science and art and all that. Do you see?"⁶

By assigning this speech to the brutish Tom Buchanan, Fitzgerald is obviously poking fun at this type of book and the people who read them. Nevertheless, there were writers, such as Wyndham Lewis, who were prepared to make sophisticated arguments for the other side. In *Paleface: The Philosophy of the Melting Pot*, Lewis complained: "Where the White Man is confronted by the Black, the Red, or the Brown, he now finds inside himself a novel sense of *inferiority*. He has, in short, an 'inferiority complex' where every non-White or simply alien personality or consciousness is concerned. Especially it is in his capacity as *civilized* (as opposed to *primitive*, "savage," 'animal,') that he has been taught to feel inferior... The trick of this inferiority complex could all be laid bare by any inquiring person that took the trouble to examine, not the purely curative doctrine of Dr. Freud, but his philosophical, literary, sociological teaching, and its psychological ramifications throughout our society. There are many factors beside Freud: but Psychoanalysis is in itself quite adequate."⁷

According to Lewis, what psychoanalysis has done is promulgate a "belief that man *cannot* "progress" beyond the savage or the animal:

that when he tries to (as the White European has done, as the Hellene did) he becomes in the mass ineffective and ridiculous..." (53). Lewis was an astute reader, because the mass of Freud's work prior to 1927, when *Paleface* was first published in magazine form, can be characterized by an attitude towards the value of civilization that is similar to Lewis's own.⁸ Although the Freud who described the relation of the Ego to the Id in colonialist terms that testify to his growing ambivalence, "Civilization behaves towards sexuality as a people or stratum of its population does which has subjected another one to its exploitation" comes out most clearly in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), published after *Paleface*, traces of this ambivalence are present from early on in Freud's career in his theory of repression.⁹

It should be clear from the above that the early decades of the twentieth century were profoundly marked by thinking about race, whether it was in the cry for racial purity that ultimately resulted in the Nazi atrocities of the Holocaust, or in the enthusiasm of white intellectuals for the cultural artifacts of nonwhite cultures that was such a fertilizing force for modern art. The first may be called "racism," while the latter may be called "primitivism." The term racism in everyday parlance designates the attitude of valuing one's own ethnic (from the Greek, *ethos*, "nation") stock over all others. In the case of primitivism, however, this valuation is inverted. It can be seen, however, that racism, and its more benign counterpart, primitivism, are actually based on the same essentialist belief that differences between the races are meaningful and enduring. Once this essential difference between one race and another is allowed, then an opposition can be set up, in which one term will naturally take precedence over another. Or, as Phyllis Rose writes in her biography of Josephine Baker, "If one is to be treated as a thing, one would rather be treated as a rare or pretty thing than as a disgusting or dangerous one. But that is still to be treated as a thing" (44).

II

That Hemingway was aware of the racialist debates going on around him is evident from the echoes of Madison Grant in the subtitle that he gave his satire, *The Torrents of Spring: A Romantic Novel in Honor of the Passing of a Great Race* (1926). Furthermore, in the minor story, "An Alpine Idyll" (1927), a brutal Austrian peasant, "with the oafish name of Olz"¹⁰ seems to be an ironic embodiment of the character that Grant assigns to his "Alpine Race." *The Torrents of Spring* is a blatant parody of Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter*, in which the agonizing slowness of the courtship of Bruce Dudley and Aline Grey is contrasted to the naturalness of Sponge Martin's relations with his wife, and the "dark chorus of Negro laughter" that functions as a backdrop to the novel. Taking its philosophical cue more from Marx than from Freud, the novel sings a dirge to "song killed, of laughter killed, of men herded into a new age of speed, of factories, of swift, fast-running trains."¹¹

The Torrents of Spring ridicules Anderson's exoticizing primitivism on the level of style and content. Replying to an admiring letter from Wyndham Lewis, Hemingway wrote: "I am very glad you liked *The Torrents of Spring* and thought you destroyed the Red and Black Enthusiasm very finely in *Paleface*. That terrible shit about the nobility of any gent belonging to another race than our own (whatever that is) was worth checking."¹² The elitist Lewis, who in *Paleface* had railed against the ascendancy of "people to whom things are done" (53), clearly sensed an ally in Hemingway. However, when Hemingway continued to produce work in what Lewis labelled the "Idiotic" mode, placing his center of consciousness in bemused or inarticulate narrators, Lewis unleashed what many critics consider to be the most damaging attack ever made on Hemingway's work.¹³ In the "Dumb Ox," published in the collection *Men Without Art* (1934), whose title itself was a

parody of Hemingway's *Men Without Women* (1927), Lewis emphasized Hemingway's stylistic debt to Gertrude Stein and his lack of political awareness, and quipped that Hemingway "invariably invokes a dull-witted, bovine, monosyllabic simpleton... [a] lethargic and stuttering dummy... a super-innocent, queerly-sensitive village-idiot of a few words and even fewer ideas."¹⁴ To Lewis, this deliberate divestiture of the power of knowledge was incomprehensible; however, a closer look at Hemingway's ambiguous attitude towards primitivism will reveal it to be a complex phenomenon that has ramifications for his entire writing career.

The earliest theorists of the primitive, Franz Boas and A.O. Lovejoy, divided primitivism into two modes: "cultural" and "chronological." Chronological, or retrospective, primitivism, is primitivism in its Arcadian mode.¹⁵ In Hemingway, chronological primitivism is reflected in his sometime interest in medievalism (the title of *A Farewell to Arms*, for instance, is derived from the title of a poem by the Elizabethan poet, George Peele),¹⁶ and most importantly, in his representation of Indian culture as being as time-bound as any other.¹⁷

This attitude can be seen most clearly in Nick Adams's final assessment of the Indians in the story "Fathers and Sons" (1933): "It wasn't how they ended. They all ended the same. Long time ago good. Now no good."¹⁸ According to one of Hemingway's letters, this phrase is derived from one that he claims to have heard from an old Indian, whose original phrasing, "Long time ago good, now heap shit," Robert W. Lewis wryly comments, "would have broken the elegiac tone of the passage in the story."¹⁹ As Hemingway's many biographers have pointed out, Hemingway's portrayals of Indians derived from actual first-hand experience with the Objibway and Ottawa Indians living near his parents' summer house in northern Michigan, thus eliminating the distance in perspective that the contemporary theorist of primitivism William Empson describes as necessary for pastoral romanticization.²⁰

According to the narrator of "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife" (1924), the Indian who provokes Dr. Adams so as not to have to work for him is "very lazy but a great worker once he was started."²¹ In "Ten Indians," (1927) nine of the Indians are drunk, while the tenth, Nick's girlfriend Trudy Boulton, turns out not only to be sexually promiscuous, but disloyal as well.

While as a rule, the Nick Adams stories portray their Indian characters as degraded, often employing tropes similar to those used to justify colonial domination,²² Hemingway's primitivism was of the "cultural" variety as well, characterized as utopian, and prospective, and seeing primitive societies as having valuable lessons to teach the present day.²³ Malcolm Cowley was one of the first critics to draw the parallel between the Indians in the autobiographical Nick Adams stories and the boxers and petty criminals of Kansas City and Chicago, the later Spanish gypsies and peasants, and the indigenous peoples of East Africa.²⁴ To Cowley, Hemingway's primitivism had none of the romanticism for which he had criticized Anderson; rather, it was concerned with a search for the "authentic." The fact that Hemingway represents the Indians as degraded, however, seems to indicate that his primitives have no better handle on "authenticity" than anyone else did. Nevertheless, Cowley was on to something, and his influential reading of "Big Two-Hearted River" as an "incantation" and a "spell," and other stories in terms of such concepts as sacrifice, initiation, symbolic death and rebirth prepared the way for an anthropologically-informed reading of Hemingway's works.

A survey of Hemingway's library at Fina Vinca reveals that far from being the "dumb ox" that Lewis charged, Hemingway had access to a wealth of current theories about the primitive. He owned fifty-seven books on Indians, as well as Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) and a complete edition of Freud's collected works, including *Totem and Taboo* (1913).²⁶ Like Freud, Frazer was one of the handful

of thinkers who can be said to have invented their disciplines, and whose "ideas made themselves felt in nearly every area of the humanities and social sciences, including literary history and criticism... Even before the artist actually picked up Frazer's book, he could easily have had some idea of its basic concepts... Throughout Frazer's career, reviews, summaries, and critiques of his work occupied extended space in numerous periodicals," including, during Hemingway's high school years, *The Chicago Evening Post*.²⁹

The First Edition of *The Golden Bough* (1890) was the one read by Hardy and Yeats; the Second Edition, published ten years later, contained Frazer's most daring speculations, notably his theories of the crucifixion of Christ and the tripartite evolution of culture from magic to religion to science. It was the one-volume abridgement of the Third Edition (1915) that had the greatest literary impact, with Eliot, Pound, and MacLeish, among others, attesting to the influence of *The Golden Bough* on their respective artistic visions.³⁰

According to Jeffrey Meyers, in his ground-breaking article "Hemingway's Primitivism and 'Indian Camp'," an understanding of anthropological concepts à la Frazer is essential to resolving the series of perplexities that the story contains,³¹ the central one of which is "Why does the Indian father kill himself?" Meyers notes that the majority of critics who have written on the story have accepted Nick's father's explanation, "He couldn't stand things, I guess," as their own. However, the array of counter-interpretations, ranging from Uncle George as the possible father of the baby to allegories of racial and sexual exploitation attest to the fact that the obvious answer is not entirely satisfactory.³²

In this reading, the Indians are implicitly contrasted with the whites who come to help —and found lacking. Nick's father, who is alternately referred to as "the father" and "the doctor" would have to be seen as a better man than the Indian —he is both a skilled

outdoorsman, "a white Indian," and a man of science. This anchor in the forces of reason, presumably, is what enables him to "stand things" while the Indian is demoralized to death. However, the horrifying details of the operation (Nick's father cuts open the unanesthetized woman with a jackknife and then sews her up again with a coarse line used as fishing tackle), told from the child's point of view, does not allow the doctor an unmediated victory.

To Meyers, the key to understanding the Indian father's behavior (why does he lie in the bunk above his wife? Why, after the baby has been safely delivered and the screaming has stopped, does he then kill himself?) is contained in the chapter entitled "Taboo and the Perils of the Soul" in the Third Edition of *The Golden Bough*. Frazer defines "taboo" as "nothing but rules intended to insure either the continued presence or the return of the soul. In short they are life preservers or lifeguards."³¹ In the section, "Tabooed Places," in the chapter on taboo, Frazer links the restrictions placed on sacred kings, chiefs, and priests in such disparate societies as the early Greek, early Roman, Australian, Eskimo, and South African to those observed by "girls at first menstruation, women after childbirth, homicides, mourners, and all persons who have come into contact with the dead." According to Frazer, during childbirth, "women are supposed to be in a dangerous condition which would infect any person or thing they might touch; hence they are put into quarantine until, with the recovery of their health and strength, the imaginary danger has passed away."³²

Meyers uses the concept of *couvade*, "in which a man ritualistically imitates the symptoms of pregnancy and moans during delivery" to explain why the Indian husband remains in the hut with his wife while the rest of the male community "had moved off up the road to sit in the dark and smoke out of range of the noise she made."³³ "The imitation by the father of many of the concomitants of childbirth [takes

place] around the time of the wife's parturition... the father may retire to bed... and observe some taboos and restrictions in order to help the child." This help is rendered in the following ways: "The father asserts his paternity through appearing to share in the delivery... The father simulates the wife's activities in order to get all the evil spirits to focus on him rather than her."³⁴⁾

As further linkage between the delivery of the child and the suicide of the father, Meyers cites the later anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, who states that the husband "associates the blood from his wife in childbed with his own death-wound,"³⁵⁾ and thus he concludes that "the pregnant wife is considered unclean, vulnerable, and in danger; the husband absorbs her weakness and associates her blood with his own death, practices couvade to protect his wife and child, and resents the intrusion of those who assist at the birth" (306). Thus, the outcome of the story is in keeping with the primitive belief in "horrible disasters which overtake those who inadvertently cross some forbidden line or develop some impure condition."³⁶⁾

However persuasive this linkage may be, it is not necessary to resort to a concept that had, at the time that Hemingway wrote "Indian Camp," not yet been published, when two possible explanations lie within *The Golden Bough* itself. One of Frazer's greatest innovations in the Second Edition, which he further refined in the Third, was the division of human belief into "magic" and "religion." "Magic," Frazer argued, was a type of science, albeit one whose logic was based upon an exploded epistemology: Hume's categories of "resemblance" and "contiguity," rather than "cause and effect," upon which modern science was based. Both magic and science "assumed a consistency in nature, together with some form of natural law which could be manipulated to beneficial effect (for oneself) and to detrimental effect (for one's enemies)."³⁷⁾ It is significant that the Indian father, although he had been listening to the screams of his wife for the past two days, does

not kill himself until the climactic arrival of the party of whites and the performance of the Cæsarian on his wife. Because of the manner in which the sequence of events is given (the Indian father is seen "smoking a pipe" in the upper bunk when Nick's party enters (87); after the delivery, when the doctor finds the dead body, "the blood had flowed down into a pool where his body sagged in the bunk" (89) but had not yet started to drip down into the lower bunk), we may assume that the Indian's application of his razor to his throat and the doctor's application of his jack-knife to the Indian woman's belly happened almost simultaneously; in which case, in an extension of the idea of *couvade*, could the Indian father have been practicing a form of magic designed to insure the success of his wife's operation by deflecting any danger onto his own?

Frazer characterized religion, which he opposed to magic, as propitiation: some powerful entity had to be appeased in the face of a wrongdoing or violation by being offered a sacrifice. The horrible details of the Indian woman's operation: the lack of anesthetic, the jack-knife, the gut leaders, all suggest a strong sense of violation. The hunting and fishing equipment used to operate on the woman's body are clearly out of place; dirt, in Mary Douglas's definition, is "matter out of place."³⁸ If the Indian father's suicide is a religious, rather than a magical act, then it can be seen as a sacrifice to atone for the violation of his wife by the white man's knife and the violent way in which his son had entered the world.

Anthropology functions here to restore what Foucault calls "subjugated knowledge"; "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity."³⁹ The "liberation" of this knowledge through this anthropologically-informed reading serves to exonerate the Indian father of both the charges of weak-mindedness and passivity,

both of which in turn have been used as tropes to justify colonial domination,

Reasons for why Hemingway might have sought to keep this knowledge "subjugated," thereby leaving himself open to charges of anti-intellectualism from Lewis and others, may partially lie in Hemingway's technique. In the late essay, "The Art of the Short Story," there is the famous dictum: "If you leave out important things or events that you know about, the story is strengthened. If you leave or skip something because you don't know it, the story will be worthless. The test of any story is how very good the stuff is that you, not your editors, leave out."⁴⁰ This buried knowledge would then presumably explain the "power" of "Indian Camp" that eludes the obvious explanation.

Of those other types of buried knowledge, knowledge to which access is denied either through physical circumstance or psychological repression, Hemingway seems to be strangely cavalier. However, Kenneth Lynn, in the latest biography of Hemingway, argues that for various reasons related to his unusual upbringing, Hemingway suffered from a chronic lack of self-knowledge that profoundly determined the course of his life:

"To be a boy but to be treated like a girl. To feel impelled to prove your masculinity through flat denials of your anxieties (*Fraid a nothing* had been your motto as a child) and bold lies about your exploits. To be forced to "render" your life artistically, because your capital of self-understanding was too small to permit you to be expansive and your fear of self-exposure too powerful. To make a virtue of necessity by packing troubled feelings below the surface of your stories like dynamite below a bridge."⁴¹

This lack of self-knowledge, the argument continues, led to a condition where public persona and private concerns grew radically apart from each other. Hemingway, as he became the preeminent figure in American letters, used his critics' interpretations of some of his

more ambiguous stories, interpretations which in turn were drawn more from what the critics thought they knew of Hemingway's life rather than from textual evidence, most notably Malcolm Cowley's "war wound" reading of "Big Two-Hearted River," to mask the tortured inner drama that led eventually to his suicide.⁴²⁾

The calm at the end of "Indian Camp" contrasts with the horror of the events that preceded it:

The sun was coming up over the hills. A bass jumped, making a circle in the water. Nick trailed his hand in the water. It felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning.

In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die (90).

Originally, Nick Adam's fear of death, which is puzzlingly alluded to in the last line, was the focus of the story. An earlier version begins with a flashback episode in which Nick sings a song in church about how "Some day the silver cord will break," after which he sits up all night reading *Robinson Crusoe*.⁴³⁾ Nick's retreat, at the end of the story, to the comforting but highly unrealistic belief that he will "never die" is, according to the critic Gerry Brenner, one of three "epistemologic formulas" that can be identified throughout Hemingway's short fiction. "Textual perplexity," the first of the three, occurs in stories that "repeatedly poke a character into circumstances ripe for his initiation..." only to have "the circumstances so overwhelm him with mixed signals that he is struck speechless or regresses to some comforting nostrum that ill deals with the confusions at hand."⁴⁴⁾ For Brenner, these formulas are recipes for indeterminacy, which he, like many other critics, links to the gender confusions brought about by the events documented in Kenneth Lynn's biography.

In her challenging essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak ?" Gayatri Spivak suggests a way in which knowledge that has been lost through

repression can be recovered through the construction of an alternative, social narrative.⁴⁶ She addresses the issue of subjugated knowledge in relation to another, misunderstood Indian (this time East Indian) cultural formation, that of *sati* ("suttee") or widow-sacrifice. Spivak counters the "epistemic violence" of the British-colonialist version of *sati*: "White men are saving brown women from brown men" with the Indian one: "The women actually wanted to die" (296-297). While not trying to downplay the negative aspects of the act, Spivak argues that the colonial government's focus on the "inhumanity" of the act occluded any notion of female free will: "That this was an alternative ideology of the graded sanctioning of suicide as exception, rather than its inscription as sin, was of course not understood. Perhaps *sati* should have been read with martyrdom, with the defunct husband standing in for the transcendental One; or with war, with the husband standing in for sovereign or state, for whose sake an intoxicating ideology of self-sacrifice can be mobilized. In actuality, it was categorized with murder, infanticide, and the lethal exposure of the very old. The dubious place of the free will of the constituted sexed subject was successfully effaced" (302).

By citing examples of self-sacrifice that have been seen as justifiable, even noble, Spivak demonstrates how sexual and racial attitudes affect the manner in which an act is perceived. Both Meyers's and Spivak's social-anthropological analyses serve to restore the quality of agency to their subjects, but Spivak's method, countering one narrative with another, with neither one being invested as "the real version," preserves the autonomy of the subaltern world under consideration as a world that has its own time and its own structures that are not necessarily coextensive with the western, academic world in which she is grounded, in much the same way as that great psychic Other, the unconscious, must be thought of as autonomous from the social world and its concerns. In anthropology, this approach most resembles that

of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who has described his work transcribing hundreds of South American myths as a "myth of mythology,"⁴⁶⁾ because "however scrupulous and objective [the ethnographer] may want to be, it is never either himself or the other whom he encounters at the end of his investigation," but rather "the superposition of himself on the other."⁴⁷⁾

Spivak's insight, combined with that of Marianna Torgovnick, that "Our interest in the primitive meshes thoroughly, in ways we have only begun to understand, with our passion for clearly marked and definable beginnings and endings that will make what comes between them coherent narratives,"⁴⁸⁾ related to Hemingway through Robert W. Lewis's suggestive comment that "references and allusions to Indians run throughout [Hemingway's] public fiction and nonfiction and private letters, not as a major element, but perhaps as a trace element essential to psychic health" (211) suggests that anthropological discourse may have some of the same psychic organizing functions as psychoanalytical narratives. By seeking to make culture conform to a narrative structure, with a "clearly marked and definable beginning and ending," anthropology teasingly promises to deliver a scientifically validated myth to remedy the private confusion of the fragmental individual.

In order to see how this process might work, let us take a look at the role that Indians play in "Fathers and Sons" (1933), chronologically the last of the Nick Adams stories. In this story, Nick, now a mature man of thirty-eight, is driving through the country somewhere in the American South with his young son sleeping on the seat beside him. The overall tone of the story is elegiac; the story begins and ends with Nick's memories of his father, and can be considered one long stream-of-consciousness meditation on the subject given in the title of the story. Typically, there is a withholding of information, with "suicide" being the key word here: "Like all men with a faculty that

surpasses human requirements, his father was very nervous. Then, he was both cruel and abused. Also he had much bad luck and it was not all of it his own. He had died in a trap he had helped only a little to set..." (406). Nick's memory of his father's unusually acute vision leads to thoughts of his nervousness and then to the events that led to his death.

Nick's father's legacy to his son "consisted of two things: fishing and shooting... it was a passion that had never slackened and he was grateful to his father for bringing him to know it" (406). The mention of passion causes Nick to consider his father's "unsound" views on sex, which for him was a dangerous business, beset with "heinous crimes... blindness, insanity, death" and the possibility of contracting "hideous venereal disease" (407).

In contrast to Nick's father's association of sex with disease, death, and crimes against nature, Nick's memories of his own sexual initiation in "the hemlock woods behind the Indian camp" is replete with natural images. In language that has much in common with the Arcadian imagery of "The Last Good Country," Nick remembers, "There was still much forest then, virgin forest where the trees grew high before there were any branches and you walked on the brown, clean, springy-needed ground with no undergrowth and it was cool on the hottest days and they three"--- Nick and his Indian girlfriend and her younger brother--- "lay against the trunk of a hemlock wider than two beds are long, with a breeze high in the tops and the cool light that came in patches, and Billy said,"

"You want Trudy again?"

"You want to?"

"Uh Huh" (409).

While the reader is called upon to witness a scene of archaic violence in "Indian Camp," the primal scene we are called upon to witness here is the spectacle of the white boy and the Indian girl making love

while the girl's younger brother looks on. The reader, older now, and experienced in the ways of the world, is to understand that the scene is cloaked in an Arcadian innocence, whose presence we feel by our distance from it. In real life, Hemingway's early sexual attitudes more closely resembled those which he assigns to the father in the story, and his initiation probably more closely resembled the sordid episode related in the early story "Up in Michigan" (1923) than Nick's rapturous union with "Trudy" in the primeval forest.⁴⁹ In rewriting his life story to include his sexual initiation with an Indian lover, Hemingway appears to be trying to extrapolate backwards a primal innocence that probably never existed.⁵⁰

Perhaps as a result of his Edenic experience, Nick rejects as unimportant the derogatory jokes that were made about the Indians. "It wasn't how they ended. They all ended the same. Long time ago good, now no good" (413). In the dream-logic of the story, the circumstances of the Indians can be seen as symbolic of Nick's feelings about his father: in this case, it wasn't how Nick's father ended that matters for Nick, or so he claims. In any case, the story ends on a reconciliatory note, with Nick's young son making him promise to take him to visit the grave of his grandfather.

One hallmark of the Indians' originary goodness is the simplicity of their language, with Trudy, as the purveyor of "pure experience" being especially characterized by the transparent simplicity of her utterances.⁵¹ Rather than trying to employ what is currently referred to as a "mastering discourse," Hemingway, in his private life and in his fiction, reviled "rhetoric," even as he acknowledged that simplicity was a style like any other.⁵² It is significant that at the end of his meditation on the Indians, Nick utters his final pronouncement in a kind of mock Indian-language, employing a trope that Henry Louis Gates has called "free indirect discourse."⁵³

Towards the end of his life, Hemingway increasingly allowed the

public persona to color his private behavior, dramatizing himself as a "white Indian," very much as his father had been.⁵⁴⁾ Besides rewriting the text of his sexual initiation and passing on the revised version to all his wives,⁵⁵⁾ he actively promoted a myth of himself as possessing one-eighth Indian blood.⁵⁶⁾ Most tellingly, he was fond of speaking in a "stage-Indian dialect... to the embarrassment of some admirers and the delight of some critics."⁵⁷⁾ While Hemingway complained that Lillian Ross's *New Yorker* profile had him talking "like a half-breed Choctaw,"⁵⁸⁾ he continued to use what he called his "Choctaw lingo" among friends.⁵⁹⁾

For different reasons, Ernest Hemingway and his predecessor Gertrude Stein were committed to a radical use of language characterized by the purposeful adoption of "idiocy" over "mastery." For Hemingway, it was a quixotic attempt to speak in an "authentic" voice, free from the machinations of rhetoric. While Hemingway seems to have associated the "primitives" in his stories with this quality of authenticity, he was aware that his myth-making was, in fact, "a myth about a myth," and that "the primitive" was not an essence, but rather a phenomenon of language.

Notes

- 1) Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," *The Common Reader* (1925) (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), 1984, p. 320. Quoted in Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) p. 85. Torgovnick, whose original and at times audacious readings range across representations of the primitive in high and low culture, as well as the twentieth-century disciplines, most notably ethnography, that have been devoted to its study, provisionally takes her definition of "the primitive" the list of characteristics of primitive society given in Stanley Diamond, in his *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization* (New Brunswick: Transaction (Dutton), 1974), namely: "the legality of custom, the presence of traditional roles, the paramount importance of kinship in social and economic organization, widespread and diffuse social and

- economic functions assigned each individual, the importance of ritual for individual and group expression... and a relative indifference to Platonic modes of thought" (Torgovnick, p. 21).
- 2) For an account of the influence of African art on modernist painting, see William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art; Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*. 2 vols. (Boston; Little, Brown, and New York; The Museum of Modern Art, 1984).
 - 3) For an excellent account of the exoticism that flourished in Paris in the 1920s, see Phyllis Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in her Time* (New York: Vintage (Random House): 1989).
 - 4) Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Scribner's, (1916) 1918) p.18.
 - 5) Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (New York; Scribner's, 1920; reprinted Westport, Conn; Negro Universities Press, (1971) p. xxx. Muret, Fournier-Fabre cited in Rose, p. 35.
 - 6) F. Scott Fitzgerald. *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner's, 1925) p. 13-14.
 - 7) Wyndham Lewis, *Paleface: The Philosophy of the Melting-Pot* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929). Reprinted in *Wyndham Lewis: An Anthology of His Prose* ed. E.W.F. Tomlin (London: Methuen & Co., 1969) p.53.
 - 8) For an account of this shift in attitude, which is related to Freud's experience as a Jew during the Second World War, see Torgovnick, "Entering Freud's Study," pp. 194-208.
 - 9) Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, Standard Edition, Trans. James Strachey, (New York: Norton, 1961), p. 57.
 - 10) Kenneth Lynn, *Hemingway* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1987) p.342.
 - 11) Sherwood Anderson, *Dark Laughter* (NY: Boni and Liveright, 1925) p. 18.
 - 12) Ernest Hemingway, *Letters* ed., Carlos Baker. p. 264.
 - 13) Jeffrey Meyers, "Hemingway's Primitivism and 'Indian Camp'," In Jackson J. Benson, ed., *New Critical Approaches to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* p. 303. See also Lynn, p. 415-16.
 - 14) Windham Lewis, "The Dumb Ox." In *Men Without Art* (1934) (NY: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1964) p. 29.
 - 15) A summary of Lovejoy's and Boas's work is given in Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization* (New Brunswick (NJ): Transaction Books, 1974); the terms "retrospective" and "prospective" are Diamond's, Cited in Robert W. Lewis, "'Long Time Ago Good, Now No Good'; Hemingway's Indian Stories." In Benson, pp. 200-212.
 - 16) See Lewis, p.208. See also, Kim Moreland, "Hemingway's Medievalist Impulse; Its Effect on the Presentation of Women and War in *The Sun*

Also Rises," *Hemingway Review* 6, no. 1 (1986): 30-41.

- 17) One of the presuppositions about primitive culture during the early modern period was that it was resistant to change; that is, that it was not subject to evolution, and had been passed to the present day essentially unchanged after hundreds of years, Franz Boas was one of the first to challenge this view, writing, in 1940, "it is exceedingly improbable that any customs of primitive people should be preserved unchanged for thousands of years." *Race, Language, and Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1940) P. 286. For a discussion of this debate within the field of art history, see William Bascomb, *African Art in Cultural Perspective: An Introduction* (New York: Praeger, 1971).
- 18) Ernest Hemingway, "Fathers and Sons" in *The First Forty-Nine Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962) p. 413.
- 19) Ernest Hemingway. *Selected Letters, 1917-1961*. ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Scribner's, 1981) p. xii. Quoted in Robert W. Lewis, p. 206.
- 20) See William Empson, "Proletarian Literature," in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935) (New York: New Directions, 1974) pp. 3-23.
- 21) Hemingway, "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife," *Stories* p. 92.
- 22) For the first, and most comprehensive account of these tropes, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Peregrine, 1987) pp. 31-110.
- 23) See Robert W. Lewis, p. 208.
- 24) Malcolm Cowley, "Introduction," *Hemingway* (New York: Viking Press, 1944). See also Leslie Fiedler, *The Return of the Vanishing American* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968).
- 25) Robert W. Lewis, p. 207.
- 26) James Brasch and Joseph Sigman, *Hemingway's Library: A Composite Record* (New York: Garland, 1981).
- 27) John B. Vickery, *The Literary Impact of "The Golden Bough"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) pp. 74-75. Quoted in Meyer, pp. 304-5.
- 28) T.S. Eliot, "A Prediction in Regard to Three English Authors," *Vanity Fair* 21 (Feb. 1924): 29. See also, Vickery, *The Literary Influence of the "Golden Bough"* (1974), and Robert Fraser, ed., *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination* (London: Macmillan, 1990).
- 29) In "presenting events and omitting the explanation," (Meyers) Hemingway is employing one of three "epistemologic formulas" that Gerry Brenner identifies in his article, "Sepi Jingan" to "Mother of a Queen": Hemingway's Three Epistemologic Formulas for Short Fiction." Brenner characterizes "textual perplexity" as a mode that repeatedly pokes a character into circumstances ripe for his initiation. But the circumstances so overwhelm him with mixed signals that he is struck speechless or regresses to some comforting nostrum that ill deals with the confusions at hand. (In Benson, p. 159).

- 30) Meyers, pp.300-303.
- 31) James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1911), 3:29. Cited in Meyers, p. 305.
- 32) Frazer, "Women Tabooed at Menstruation and Childbirth" 3:138, in Meyers, p. 305.
- 33) Hemingway, "Indian Camp," in *The First Forty-Nine Stories*, p. 87. All subsequent citations will be incorporated into the text.
- 34) Charles Winnick, *Dictionary of Anthropology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956) p. 137. Quoted in Meyers, p. 306.
- 35) Lucien Levy-Bruhl, "Taboos Relating to Confinements," in *Primitives and the Supernatural*, trans. Lilian Clark (New York: Dutton, 1935), p. 331, in Meyers, p. 306.
- 36) Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966) p. 1.
- 37) Robert Fraser, *The Making of "The Golden Bough"* (London: Macmillan, 1990) p. 135.
- 38) Douglas, p. 2.
- 39) Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77* trans. Colin Gordon et al. New York: Pantheon) p. 84.
- 40) Hemingway, "The Art of the Short Story," in Benson, p. 3.
- 41) Lynn, *Hemingway* p. 318.
- 42) Malcolm Cowley, "Introduction" to *The Portable Hemingway* (NY: Viking, 1944). Cited in Kenneth Lynn, "The Troubled Fisherman," in Benson, pp. 147-155.
- 43) Ernest Hemingway, "Three Shots," *The Nick Adams Stories* (NY: Scribner, 1972), pp. 13-15.
- 44) Gerry Brenner, "From 'Sepi Jingan' to 'Mother of a Queen': Hemingway's Three Epistemologic Formulas for Short Fiction," in Brenner, pp. 156-171. The other two "formulas" are "lexical riddle," and "extratextual reversal." The former is based on the deliberate withholding of a key word, "lesbian" in the case of "The Sea Change," for example, while the latter is characterized by a sudden departure from stereotypical behavior, as in the case of the fast-thinking boxer in "Fifty Grand."
- 45) Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In Cary Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Carbondale: University of Illinois Press, 1988). The term "subaltern" comes from Antonio Gramsci's "Notes on Italian History," in which the subaltern classes are defined chiefly by their not being part of the "dominant" or ruling class. See Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971) pp. 44-52.
- 46) Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, tr. John and Doreen

- Weightman (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 1-14.
- 47) Levi-Strauss, *The Scope of Anthropology*, tr. S. Ortner Paul and R.A. Paul (1967, rpt. London: Jonathan Cape, 1971) p. 15. Both quoted in Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 60.
- 48) Torgovnick, p. 245.
- 49) Lynn, pp.570-71. Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: A Life Story* (New York: Macmillan, 1969) p.26.
- 50) In later life, beset by questions about his manliness brought about by age and alcoholism, Hemingway was once again to turn to the myth of a dark-skinned lover as source of renewal for both his waning sexual power and writing career, writing to a friend from safari: "My girl is black and very beautiful." She is "completely impudent, but absolutely loving and delicate rough. I better quit writing about it because I want to write it really and I mustn't spoil it. Anyway it gives me too bad a hardon," In Lynn, pp.570-571.
- 51) At one point Trudy says: "You shoot Nickie. Scare him. We see him jump. Shoot him again." Nick notes, "It was a long speech for her" (409).
- 52) To take two examples: Hemingway declared *The Old Man and the Sea* to be superior to Faulkner's Nobel Prize oration, asserting that his work had been done "without tricks or rhetoric" (Baker, p. 503); in the posthumous novel, *The Garden of Eden*, the writer-character David Bourne chides himself for asking a rhetorical question, on the grounds that "He disliked rhetoric and distrusted those who used it." *The Garden of Eden* (New York: Macmillan, 1986) p. 224.
- In "The Art of the Short Story," Hemingway writes: "I am using in this lecture the spoken language, which varies. It is one of the ways to write... Anyone who can write can write spoken, pedantic, inexorably dull, or pure English prose, just as slot machines can be set for straight, percentage, give-away or stealing..." (In Benson, p. 8).
- 53) Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (NY: Oxford, 1988). Gates defines "free indirect discourse" as a "hybrid character, a character who is neither the novel's protagonist nor the text's disembodied narrator, but a blend or both, an emergent and emerging moment of consciousness" xxvi.
- 54) Peter Griffin, in his biography, *Along With Youth: Hemingway, The Early Years* (NY: Oxford, 1985) relates that as a young man Clarence Edmonds Hemingway spent two months at "a mission school for the Dakota Sioux" (6); Leicester Hemingway, in his memoir, *My Brother. Ernest Hemingway* (Cleveland: World, 1962) says it was three months.
- 55) Lynn, pp. 51-52.

- 56) In a letter, Hemingway writes of his initiation into an African tribe: "I was the first and only white man or $1/8$ Indian who was ever a Kamba, and it is not like President Coolidge being given a warbonnet by tame Blackfoot or Shoshone..." In a letter to Charles Scribner, he claimed "a Cheyenne great-great-grandmother," (*Letters* 659), which, incidentally, would have made him only $1/16$ Indian. The tribe is further specified in a letter to his son Gregory, who he calls "a real Indian boy (North Cheyenne) with the talents and the defects" (679). Quoted in Robert W. Lewis, p.480.
- 57) Robert W. Lewis, p. 201.
- 58) Lynn, p. 553.
- 59) Lloyd R. Arnold, *High on the Wild with Hemingway* (Caldwell (ID): Caxton, 1968).